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Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Massive human rights violations in Burundi

Despite widespread criticism, Burundi has voted in May 2018 for a constitutional change potentially allowing the president to remain in power until 2034. Meanwhile President Pierre Nkurunziza declared that he will support the future President of the Republic when his mandate ends in 2020. We are welcoming this decision, which brings hope that arbitrary arrests, torture, disappearances and summary executions finally will end. But Nkurunziza's declaration lacks a clear and firm commitment not to run for president in the upcoming elections.

In the first five months of 2018 those opposed to the proposed amendment of the constitution became victims of massive human rights violations. On May 11, 2018, unidentified armed attackers shot and hacked to death at least 26 men, women and children in Ruhagagarika village.

On February 24, 2018, Dismas Sinzinkayo, a member of the National liberation Forces (FNL), was beaten to death by members of the ruling party's youth league Imbonerakure in Kayanza Province. Local human rights organizations have registered more than 480 politically motivated murders by Imbonerakure in 2017 and the first quarter of 2018. There is a widespread fear among the civil society in Burundi to become victim of intimidation or deliberate killings by members of the youth league. Sometimes Imbonerakure members are acting jointly with regular security forces to intimidate or persecute political opponents or their family members. Since April 2015, members of the youth league have arrested, attacked or beaten hundreds of FNL members and incited ethnic hatred between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic group. Due to the lack of an independent justice system, impunity prevails for these systematic human rights abuses.

Numerous people have been arrested because they called for a "No" vote in the referendum or they refused to join the ruling party. Many victims of these arbitrary arrests reported about torture and ill-treatment in detention. Some 400,000 people have fled the country due to this on-going political violence and repression by state security officials or Imbonerakure members.

We are deeply concerned about the fate of human rights defenders, who are persecuted and arbitrarily arrested. With deep concern we have followed the case of Germain Rukuki who was sentenced to 32 years of jail on a range of trumped-up charges in April 2018. The president of the Njabutsa Tujane community organization and employee of the Burundian Catholic Lawyers Association was arrested in July 2017 and accused of threatening state security and supporting armed rebels.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the U.N. Human Rights Council to urge the Government of Burundi:

- To stop intimidation and harassment of journalists, human rights activists and political opponents;
- To end impunity for crimes committed by Imbonerakure members;
- To stop inciting ethnic hatred between Hutu and Tutsi;
- To resume cooperation with United Nations mechanisms, especially with the Commission of Inquiry.